

AGENCY POLICY ON PREMIUM CLASS AIR TRAVEL

- A. The United States Government and the U.S. Agency for International Development require that employees who use commercial air carriers for domestic and international travel on official business use ***coach-class*** airline accommodations, including contract or city pair fares if available.
- B. The Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), 41 C.F.R. Part 301-10.124, provide certain ***limited*** exceptions to the above rule when specifically authorized by the Agency. It is the policy of the Agency to limit authorization and payment of transportation expenses to those expenses that result in the greatest advantage to the Government and to ensure that travel is by the most expeditious means practicable. This section defines the limited exceptions and sets forth the approval process. This section applies to TDY, reassignment, and all other travel funded by the Agency.
- C. The provisions of this section apply only to business class travel, which is defined as premium class accommodations less than first class. First class shall only be approved, in advance, by the Deputy Administrator, in consultation with the Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO). A justification for first class travel must be in writing and must set forth in detail the rationale, consistent with 41 C.F.R. Part 301-10.124.
- D. There is no entitlement to business class accommodation for overseas trips in excess of 14 hours. Business class travel is authorized when the origin and/or destination of the trip is outside the Continental United States and the scheduled flight time, including scheduled stops in transit, is in excess of 14 hours. If approved, the traveler will not be eligible for a rest stop en route or a rest period upon arrival at the duty site. The determination as to whether an employee shall travel business class or shall be scheduled for a rest stop is a decision to be made by the AMS officer or EXO of the funding office. In making these decisions, the responsible officers are expected to keep in mind the limited availability of OE funds and the fact that generally schedules do permit rest stops. In no case may these decisions be based on a traveler's grade or position. The nature of a traveler's pending duties may be a relevant factor. If business class travel is approved, the rationale must be documented on the travel authorization (TA).
- E. Business class travel may be approved if any of the other following circumstances apply. A request for business class accommodations under any of these provisions must be accompanied by a *full written justification, setting forth in detail why the provision applies to your particular situation and addressing all aspects of the provision*. The justification must be cleared by the office(s) described in each provision. Blanket justifications covering classes of employees or recurring circumstances are not permitted. Justifications must be fully approved prior to the issuance of tickets.

1. Regularly scheduled flights between origin/destination points (including connecting points) provide only business class accommodations. In this situation, you must describe the required routing and why no alternative using coach class accommodation is available. The justification must be cleared by M/AS/TT (when funded in Washington) or by the EXO (when funded outside Washington). Additionally, you must certify as to the unavailability of coach class accommodations on your voucher.
2. No space is available in coach-class accommodations in time to accomplish the mission, which is urgent and cannot be postponed. In this situation, you must describe the required routing and why no alternative using coach class accommodation is available. You must set forth in detail why the mission is urgent and cannot be postponed. The justification must be cleared by your immediate supervisor (as to the immediacy and urgency of the mission) and M/AS/TT (when funded in Washington) or by the EXO (when funded outside Washington).
3. Business class is necessary to accommodate your disability or other special physical need.
 - a. “Disability” is defined as a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of a person’s major life activities. Requests for business class travel based on disability will be treated as requests for reasonable accommodation pursuant to ADS 110.3.5.6 and processed accordingly.
 - b. “Special physical need” includes physical conditions that do not rise to the level of a disability. A request under this provision must be substantiated in writing in detail and must include current medical documentation provided by a competent medical authority which addresses the specific reason business class accommodation is necessary. (However, medical documentation is not required when the physical need is visible and discernible.) A justification under this provision must be cleared by the DAEO, in consultation with the Chief of Staff (when funded in Washington), or by the mission director (when funded outside Washington).
4. Security purposes make the use of business class accommodations essential to the successful performance of the Agency’s mission. A justification under this provision must state why security concerns make business class accommodations essential, and must be cleared by SEC (when funded in Washington) or by the mission director, in consultation with the Regional Security Officer (RSO) (when funded outside Washington).

5. Coach-class accommodations on an authorized/approved foreign air carrier do not provide adequate sanitation or health standards. A justification under this provision must set forth in detail the nature of the sanitation or health issues, citing the evidence relied upon, and must be cleared by the EXO, in consultation with the Regional Medical Officer (RMO), responsible for the foreign area in which the travel takes place.
 6. The use of business class results in an overall cost savings to the Government by avoiding additional subsistence costs, overtime, or lost productive time while awaiting coach-class accommodations. A justification under this provision must contain a detailed cost analysis, and must be cleared by M/AS/TT (when funded in Washington) or by the EXO (when funded outside Washington).
 7. When required because of Agency mission. A justification under this provision must fully describe the mission requirements and why other alternatives which would allow the use of coach class accommodations are not sufficient. In no case may these decisions be based on a traveler's grade or position. The nature of a traveler's pending duties may be a relevant factor. A justification under this provision must be cleared by the DAEO, in consultation with the Chief of Staff (when funded in Washington), or by the mission director (when funded outside Washington).
- F. These provisions do not apply when transportation costs are paid in full through Agency acceptance of payment from a non-federal source in accordance with 41 C.F.R. Part 304-1. In those cases, the procedures set forth in ADS 522.5.20 shall apply.
- G. These provisions do not apply when the traveler pays for an upgrade at personal expense, uses a personal frequent flyer account for a class upgrade, or when an upgrade is provided as a promotional item with no cost to the Agency. When an upgrade is provided as a promotional item the traveler should verify with GC/EA whether the upgrade may be accepted pursuant to 5 C.F.R §2635.204(c).
- H. This policy supersedes the previous ADS 522.5.8 and any other previously-existing Agency or mission policies or practices concerning premium class air travel.